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ABSTRACT

Educational status of Indian students was found to be inferior to status of non-Indian students when measured by enrollment, attendance, dropout rate, and nonenrollment. The study found that Indian student enrollment had increased 2.3% from 1983 to 1984; average daily attendance was 4% less than for non-Indian students; dropout rates for Indian students in grades 9-12 was 33.2% in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and 24.4% in public schools receiving Johnson-O'Malley funds; and an estimated 4.5% of Indian children were not enrolled in an educational program. Data for the study were gathered primarily from questionnaires returned by 41 Bureau of Indian Affairs or contract schools and 13 offices of education in states with schools receiving Johnson-O'Malley funds. Other data sources included onsite visits and telephone interviews with officials in agencies concerned with Indian education. The difficulties encountered in obtaining exact data about the Indian student population were described, including no universally accepted definition of Federally recognized Indians, no uniform data gathering or recordkeeping system for Indian students, no central data depository, fequent student transfers between schools, and variations in computation of average daily attendance. Tables and figures provide supplementary information. (LFL)

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The Educational Status of Federally Recognized Indian Students Enrolled in or Eligible for Enrollment in BIA and BIA Contract Schools, and Schools Receiving Support VIA the Johnson-O'Malley Act

by

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August 6, 1985

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Paper presented at the Evaluation Network/Evaluation Research Society (San Francisco, CA, October 10-13, 1984).

PREFACE

The data contained herein describe the educational status of Federally recognized Indian students enrolled in, and eligible for enrollment in, 1) BIA and BIA contract schools, and 2) public schools receiving support via the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934.[1]

Data for the study were generated through onsite visits, reviews of relevant literature; questionnaires sent to schools, BIA Area offices, and state offices of education; and telephone contacts with officials and administrators in the United States Department of the Interior, the United States Department of Education, BIA Area and agency offices, state Offices of Education, the Census Bureau, and BIA and public schools. Although the data are unofficial, it is the author's position that they are characteristic of the general educational status of Federally recognized Indian students in America.

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[1] Public School Assistance (Johnson O'Malley Program) - The BIA provides funds under the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934 to meet the special needs of Indian students in public schools. These funds, which are largely administered through contracts with tribal organizations, public school districts and State Departments of Education, enable the contractors to provide supplemental programs for Indian students. The Bureau has JOM contracts for administration and development of programs with 196 tribal groups, 64 school districts and 6 state departments of education. There are 742 Indian parent committees working with these contractors. (Facts on American Indians and Alaskan Natives, United States Department of the Interior, BIA, October, 1982.)

INTRODUCTION

In the January, 1972 issue of Phi Delta Kappan (p. 293), as an addendum to an article written by Theodore Kaltsoun entitled "The Need to Indianize Indian Schools," was contained this statement:

> Indian Dropout Rate High
>
> By 1969 there were 240,700 Indian students between the ages of 5 and 18 in the U.S., of whom 66.7% attended public schools, 27.3% federal schools, and 6% missions and other schools. Fifty to 60% of these children will drop out before they reach high school - double the national average. Ten years ago two out of three adult Indians had no education beyond elementary school; one in four had less than five years of formal schooling. Among the Navajos, over 4,000 school-age children are not attending school, and in fact 10% of all American Indians over the age of 14 have had no schooling at all.

Since 1979 and the passage of P.L. 95-561,[2] statistical requirements have changed dramatically concerning the educational status of Federally recognized Indian students enrolled in, or eligible for enrollment in, BIA and BIA contract schools, and public schools receiving support via the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934. Prior to 1979, schools serving such children were required, for funding and accounting purposes, to submit to the Bureau of Indian Affairs data from which a broad array of descriptive statements could be made: dropout rates, average

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[2] P.L. 95-561: Education Amendments of 1978, resulted in extensive changes in the child count requirements.

daily membership, average daily attendance, and rates of non-attendance, to name a few. Without these data readily available from a single source, and for the purposes of this study, it became necessary to individually contact school administrators at the federal, BIA Area, state and school levels.

As one considers the data contained herein, it must be remembered that to produce exact data points descriptive of the education of Federally recognized Indian students in virtually impossible; consequently, a statement of the limiting circumstances effecting this study has been included.

Although some data were gathered by telephone and onsite visits, the major data gathering effort involved mailing a questionnaire to a stratified random sample[3] of 127 of the 188 Indian schools (including contract schools) listed in the 1982-83 BIA Education Directory, and to all of the state offices of education in the 26 states which have public schools that receive Johnson-O'Malley funds. Because of the relatively low response rate to the questionnaire (33% from the Indian schools, and 52% from the state offices of education), a non-response bias check was conducted on a randomly selected sample of 30% of the non-respondents. A comparison of the data generated by the bias

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[3] Stratified by area. Sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula found in "Determining Sample Size for Research Activities", Educational and Psychological Measurement, 1970 (30), pp 607-610.

check were so similar to the figures generated by the mail-returned questionnaires that the conclusion was drawn that the data are representative even though the original response rate was somewhat low.

LIMITING CIRCUMSTANCES

The findings of this study are neither 100% conclusive or 100% generalizable. The following circumstances combined to limit the study:

1. There is no clear, universally respected and accepted definition of "Federally recognized" Indians. The Snyder Act of 1921 states that eligibility requires 1/4 Indian blood. However, it was frequently acknowledged and observed that because of poor records, arbitrary decisions, a lack of preciseness, carelessness, precidence, convenience, and need, children are enrolled as Federally recognized Indians who do not, in fact, meet eligibility requirements. (The author personally met several such ineligible students enrolled in BIA schools.)
2. There is no standard, uniform data gathering and/or record keeping system at any level. Since 1979, when the need for data changed, the variance with which records have been kept has been extensive, ranging from the keeping of no more data than is absolutely necessary, to keeping and publishing a vast array of data. A consequence of this is that even when discussing the same data point, such as the number of BIA

schools, there is no single agreed upon figure.

3. There is no central depository for data. Whether at the national, area, state, or agency level, there is no single contact by which data can be obtained for the schools served within the administrative unit. As a consequence, it is usually necessary to contact the schools individually, which was the case with this study. Even then, the data may or may not be available.

4. Indian students frequently move, sometimes repeatedly during a single school year, from one school to another. A student living near both a BIA school and a public or private school may transfer back and forth for a variety of reasons: expulsion, hope for a more compatable academic placement, parental dissatisfaction, and so on. Boarding schools, both on and off the reservation, and BIA alternative high schools frequently experience the mid-school enrollment of students who have dropped out of public schools and find placement in a BIA school as their last resort to educational opportunity.

5. In BIA schools, average daily attendance (ADA) is typically not computed on a daily basis for official reporting purposes. Rather, "attendance" data are reported twice yearly, once in the Fall and once in the Spring, during what are called "count weeks". Since funding decisions are based on the size of ADA, considerable extra effort is typically made to assure optimum attendance during count weeks.

FINDINGS

The variables of primary interest to this study are 1) Indian student enrollment in BIA and public schools, 2) average daily attendance of Indian students in BIA and public schools, 3) drop out rates of Indian students enrolled in BIA and public schools, and 4) the incidence of non-enrollment of school aged Indian children in any type of BIA or public school.

Populations of Indians Enrolled in BIA and Public Schools

Figure 1 compares the number of Indian students enrolled in BIA and public schools in FY 1983 and 1984. The total number of students for 1983 was 208,442, and for FY 1984 is 213,223,[4] which represents a 2.3% increase over FY 83.

Figure 2 provides a comparison of average populations by grade level (based on FY 1984 statistics). As can be seen, as Indian students move through the grades, average populations by grade decrease substantially--which suggests that the BIA school system has a serious problem with dropout rates.

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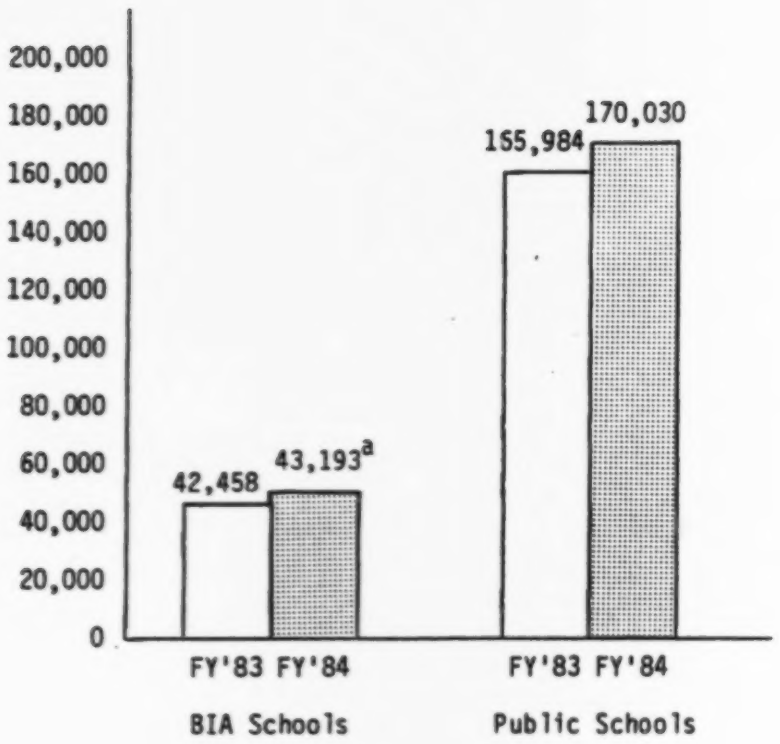
[4] Provided by telephone by the Office of Indian Education Programs.



[a]This is an estimate that includes 1984 BIA funded students who live in dorms and attend public schools.

Figure 1: Enrollment of Federally Recognized Indian Students

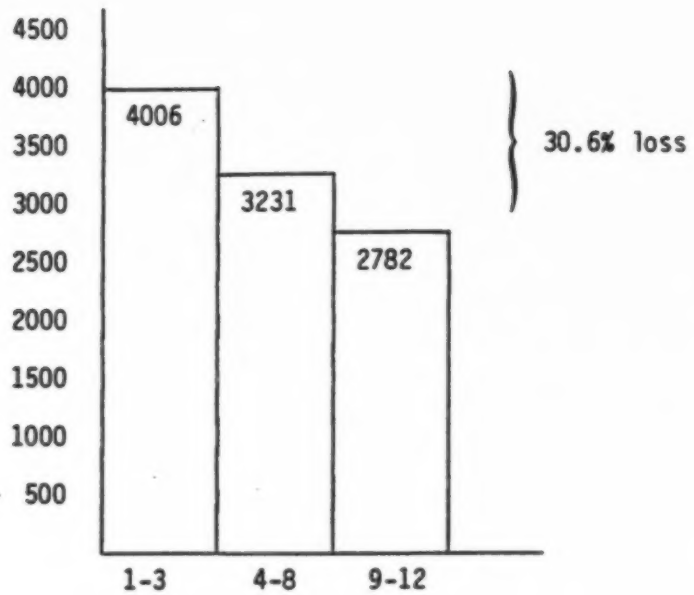


Figure 2. Average student populations by grade level.

During FY 1983, 19.7% of the Indian students were served by 227 BIA schools, with the remaining 80.3% served by public schools in 26 states. In FY 1984, 20% were being served in an estimated 213 BIA schools,[5] and 80% in public schools in 26 states.

Average Daily Attendance (ADA)

A critical statistic in determining the status of students in any educational system is the percent of students enrolled in

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[5] Several BIA schools were closed beginning FY'84, particularly in Alaska where the schools have been absorbed into the State System. The plan is to eventually turn over to the State of Alaska all BIA schools in the state.

school (average daily memberships - ADM) who are actually attending school (average daily attendance - ADA). To identify this ratio, BIA and public school administrators were asked to report this statistic for grades 1-8 and 9-12. Table 2 displays these data.

Table 2

Reported Average Daily Attendance of Federally Recognized Indian Students

	Indian Students Enrolled in BIA Schools[a]	Indian Students Enrolled in Public Schools	Non-Indian Public School ADA
Grades 1-8	92.3%	93.0%	-
Grades 9-12	87.4%	85.6%	-
Overall Average	89.9%	89.2%	93.7%[b]

[a]Including BIA contract schools

[b]As reported by the National Center for Educational Statistics: FY '81.

The data indicate that, in general, Federally recognized Indian students are in attendance about 4% less than are students in public schools.

Dropout Rates

Another critical statistic in determining the status of students is the rate of school dropouts. These data are shown in Table 3. Only data for grades 9-12 were gathered.

The reported mean annual dropout rates were 33.2% for students in BIA and BIA contract schools, and 24.4% for Federally recognized Indian students enrolled in public school programs. Compounding this statistic is the fact that very few Indian student dropouts either re-enter school and acquire a high school diploma, or fulfill high school graduation requirements through some other means (e.g., going to night school or passing the G.E.D. test).

In 1978, in a report to the Assistant Secretary for Programs for the BIA,[6] it was reported that "it is a matter of record that public schools have failed at least 70% of the [Indian] students enrolled in residential schools" (p 1.), a reference to the fact that 70% of the students in BIA residential schools are dropouts from the public schools. The report further noted that "Public schools cannot meet the extraordinary educational and social needs of Indian children" (p 3.). There is little evidence available to suggest that since 1978 circumstances have improved for Indian students enrolled in public school programs.

In all probability, the dropout rates among Indian students in public schools is as great, or nearly as great, as in BIA/BIA contract schools, and often represents something of a "double jeopardy" situation; i.e., students drop out of a public school into a BIA school, then drop out altogether from the BIA schools,

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[6] Off Reservation Residential Schools Operated by the BIA. A report to Rick Lavis, Assistant Secretary for Programs, September 15, 1978. (Hereafter referred to as the "Lavis Report.")

Table 3

Reported Dropout Rates of Federally Recognized Indian Students from Grades 9-12

	Enrolled in BIA Schools	Enrolled in Public Schools
Percent (grades 9-12)	33.2%	24.4%

or vice versa. In either case, the result is an inordinately high dropout rate which can escalate as high as (and even higher than) 50% in some schools.

Statistics concerning the dropout rates reported herein should be interpreted with two qualifications:

1. The United States Department of Education reports dropout rates for students aged 17 and 18 only. These are the ages among which the dropout rates are highest. To make a reasonable comparison between Indian and non-Indian students would require a reanalysis of the data to include only Indian students age 17-18. Since no data are available by which such a comparison can be made, one must proceed on the basis of assumptions, one of which is that the highest dropout rates are at the highest grade levels. If this assumption is true, it is further reasonable to assume that the high school aged Indian student dropout rate is well above the 33.2% reported by this study. The Lavis Report of 1978 estimated the rate to be between 40% and 50%.
2. The average national dropout rate, as of school year 1979-1980, was reported to be 28%. This statistic is a bit misleading, and creates a false impression about the number of individuals who do not have at least the equivalent of a high school education. Though the national average dropout rate, which "includes [students] of regular day school programs, but excludes...Federal schools for Indians...", is reported to be 28%; however, the percentage of Americans who do not have the equivalent of a high school education is

16%, as reported by the Census Bureau (by telephone). What this means is that a substantial number of dropouts from public schools return to some form of schooling and earn high school level certification, or the equivalent thereof. This happy circumstance does not appear to be characteristic of Indian dropouts. Referring again to the Lavis Report, "17% of the parents [of Indian children] have no formal education and 33% have an 8th grade or less formal education" a finding that is frighteningly consistent with both this study, and the 1969 study cited at the outset of this report.

Non-Enrolled

As noted in the 1969 study referenced in the Introduction to this report, it was estimated there that "10% of all American Indians over the age of 14 have had no schooling at all." Though very little, if any, precise data exist relative to non-enrollment, the estimates shown in Table 4 do provide a reasonable estimate of the magnitude of the problem among school-aged American Indian children today.

Despite the "soft" nature of the non-enrollment statistics that have been generated by this study, it is safe to conclude that they represent a persisting problem that effects a considerable number of school aged Indian children. Data from this study suggest that about 4.5% of all eligible, Federally recognized Indian students are not enrolled in any type of an educational program. Data from the 1977 edition of Statistics Concerning Indian Education reveal that of the 219,212 Indian

students identified by the 1977 census as being of school age, 45,276 were in BIA/BIA contract schools, and 155,430 were in public schools, leaving 8006 children, or 3.7%, unaccounted for; a comparative statistic that tends to support the 4.5% figure derived from this study.

Table 4

Percentage Estimates of Eligible But Not Enrolled Federally Recognized Indian Students of School Age

	BIA Schools	Public Schools[a]
Grades 1 - 8	1.7%[b]	-
Grades 9 - 12	7.1%[b]	-
Overall Average	4.5%	4%[b]

[a] Public school administrators were unable to make distinctions by grade level.

[b] An average of estimates. No data of record are available.

Admittedly, those data are fraught with problems effecting exactness; however, to dismiss the data as being of no relevance is as unacceptable as it is to ignore the grave circumstance to which the data relate; i.e. that there are many eligible Indian

students of school age who are not enrolled in school at all. Whether one supports this position by referring to the 1969 study quoted above, the extrapolations of the 1977 census figures, or the data provided by this study is immaterial.

SUMMARY

Despite the many constraints and limitations to the conduct of this study, data have been made available via this study which provide an at best profile of the extent to which Indian students are enrolled in and attending school. In every instance, the status of Indian students, whether enrolled in BIA, BIA contract, or public schools, is inferior to the status of non-Indian students, as shown in Table 5.

Given the generally poor quality of life that is typical on Indian reservations (high unemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse, child and spouse abuse, suicide rates, and unstable homes) it is doubly tragic that the educational status of Indian students is inferior as well; a circumstance that should be a matter of the highest priority to Indian educators nationwide.

Translating the dropout and non-enrollment percentages reported in Table 5 into numbers of students, as shown in Table 6, one is able to capture a glimpse of the magnitude of some of the problems facing Indian education in America today. What these numbers mean is that eleven (11) to seventeen (17)[7] of every one hundred chairs intended for Indian students in the schools of America are sitting empty for the entire school year.

[7] Computed by dividing 23,515 and 36,615 by 213,223.

Table 5

A Comparison of the Educational Status of Indian and Non-Indian Students

	Indian Students		
	In BIA Schools	In Public Schools	Non-Indian Students
ADA	89.9%	89.2%	93.7%
Annual Dropout Rates	33.2% - 50%[a]	24.4% - 50%[a]	16%
Not Enrolled	4.5%	-	0.5 - 0.75%[b]

[a] This range takes into consideration data from sources other than the questionnaire, e.g., the Lavis Report, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Census Bureau. Since the ADA percentages tend toward consistency, the questionnaire data are considered to be adequate, as is also the case with the non-enrollment figures.

[b] An estimate provided to the author by telephone by the Census Bureau.

Table 6

Numbers of Indian Students Effected by Dropout and Non-Enrollment Rates[a]

	In BIA Schools	In Public Schools	TOTALS
Dropouts (Grades 9-12)	3,694-5,564[a]	10,704-21,934[b]	14,398-27,498
Non-Enrolled	2,032[c]	7,085[d]	9,117
TOTALS	5,726-7,598	17,789-29,019	23,515-36,615

[a] The BIA reported that of the 43,193 students enrolled in BIA/BIA contract schools, 11,128 were enrolled in grades 9-12. This figure was multipled by .332, the average annual dropout rate reported by this study; and .5, the estimated dropout rate found in the Lavis Report.

[b] Since the BIA has no readily available figures for the number of public school enrolled Indian students who are in grades 9-12, the percentage of 9th-12th grade students enrolled in BIA/BIA contract schools was used: 11,128 divided by 43,193 = 25.8%. Multiplying 170,030 by .258 = 43,868. This figure was then multiplied by .244, the average annual dropout rate reported by this study, and .5, the estimated dropout rate found in the Lavis Report.

[c] The BIA reported that there are an estimated 43,193 Indian students enrolled in BIA/BIA contract schools during FY '84. If 4.5% of all eligible Indian children are not thus enrolled, the 43,193 figure represents 95.5% of the eligible population, or 45,225. Subtracting 43,193 from this figure gives the total of unenrolled students as 2,032.

[d] If 4% of all Federally recognized Indian students who would otherwise be in public schools are not enrolled in public or BIA schools, then 170,030 students represent 96% of the Indian children eligible for enrollment in public schools. subtracting 170,030 students from 171,115 (a figure which represents 100% of all eligible students), we derive 7,085: the number of eligible though non-enrolled students.

Despite the fact that these computations involved a number of extrapolations and assumptions, it is the author's judgment that the results are highly representative.

Compounding this with truancy and other forms of absenteeism, on any given school day, twenty-one (21) to twenty-seven (27) of every one hundred chairs intended for Indian students in the schools of America are sitting empty.

Not only is "A Nation At Risk," but nations within a nation are at even greater risk.

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